



GROWING IN SMALL SPACES

GOOD FOOD FOR ALL

Small gardens in inner city areas can be very productive. Even balconies and window boxes can produce a surprising amount of food. Many foods can be grown 'vertically' by using uprights such as trellises, pergolas, stakes and fences.

Peppers, melons, lettuce, radishes, carrots, courgettes, and tomatoes are a few things that can be grown and in remarkable quantity. If you don't have a balcony, a sunny window might work, but you may have to pollinate fruiting vegetables. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme and sage are easy to grow and are so much nicer fresh. Most herbs actually like it tough so something can be grown even in the most harsh environment. Perpetual spinach is also very easy - you can grow it from seed and it will keep cropping for months. Strawberries are very easy especially the alpine kind, and thornless loganberries can be trained up or over the railings.

Here are a few hints and tips to get you started

Choosing your container

1. Containers for vegetable plants must: (1) be big enough to support plants when they are fully grown; small pots dry out quickly at the height of summer and don't produce such luscious crops (2) hold soil without spilling, (3) have adequate drainage, and (4) never have held products that would be toxic to plants or people. Flowerpots can be expensive but there are lots of other things that you can use instead, such as buckets, dustbins and old sinks. Give them a coat of paint and fill them with plants and no one will notice what they used to be.
2. Avoid plastic pots in windy sites - they can blow over easily and damage

the plants. Instead, choose colourful glazed or terracotta pots, ensuring they have a large drainage hole in the base.

3. After putting in a layer of gravel or broken-up polystyrene trays to improve drainage at the base, fill with compost. Any multi-purpose potting compost will do, including peat-free types, or one specifically formulated for patio pots.

4. To encourage better water retention, especially beneficial to many fruits and vegetables, it can be an advantage to thoroughly mix in water-retaining gel crystals. At the same time, add sufficient slow-release fertiliser granules to provide nutrients right through summer.



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Growing tips and suggestions

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- ◆ Trailing tomatoes, peppers and green or golden courgettes can be grown in pots, as well as leafy salads, parsley, spring onions, mini-beetroot, sage, chives and many other vegetables and herbs.
- ◆ Adding a wigwam of canes or a plant support frame to the pot allows you to include climbers, too, such as French and runner beans.
- ◆ Many new gardeners will prefer to buy young plants from garden centres, but raising plants from seed can save you money and also offers a wider choice of plant varieties.
- ◆ Try growing crops in tubs on your patio, hanging baskets or window-boxes.
- ◆ Include a few varieties of edible flower, such as nasturtium, calendula or viola to pick for decorating summer salads.
- ◆ Tomato 'Tumbler' will put on a spectacular show with masses of fruit and foliage spilling over the edge of the container.
- ◆ Not only are peppers an essential part of the Mediterranean cuisine, the shiny fruits will look perfectly at home in a patio container.
- ◆ Courgette flowers grown in pots are both attractive and edible and the fruits make a tasty addition to any meal.
- ◆ Always water plants immediately after planting or sowing and then regularly through the summer.
- ◆ While the majority of growing bags are bought for cultivating tomatoes or peppers, they can also be used for providing a wide range of other salad crops. For example, spring onions, lettuces, radishes, spinach will all do well in bags, as too will herbs such as basil, rocket, chervil, parsley and coriander. Just remember to position the bags in a sunny spot and to keep them watered.
- ◆ Large pots (10-12in size) can be filled with the contents of growing bags to provide the perfect place for carrots and beetroot. You can also use them to grow french beans. If you want the tastiest, earliest and blemish-free new potatoes of the summer, pots are the perfect way to produce them. Go for a slightly larger container (12-16in) and plant one tuber per pot.

Publications and articles

- ◆ Guerra, Michael. The Edible Container Garden: Growing Fresh Food in Small Spaces, ISBN 0684854619, March 2000
- ◆ Carol Klein. The Edible Container Garden: Fresh Food from Tiny Spaces, ISBN 1856752208 March 2005
- ◆ <http://www.permaculture.co.uk/mag/Articles/indoor.html>
- ◆ http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/growfruitandveg_index.shtml